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on page A-27*Rowland Evans and Robert Novak*

# The Chiefs Knock SALT

A secret warning in writing that "the interest of the United States will not be served" unless "ambiguities" are removed from SALT II has been sent President Carter by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at least suggesting possible military opposition to the treaty.

The new strategic arms limitation treaty most likely will be endorsed, however unenthusiastically, by each of the four service chiefs and their chairman, Air Force Gen. David C. Jones, when they testify during Senate ratification hearings. By that time, all five of the chiefs will owe their jobs to Jimmy Carter, who has amply demonstrated his refusal to accept independent judgments from the Pentagon brass that conflict with his own.

Nevertheless, the confidential letter the chiefs sent Carter March 12, via Defense Secretary Harold Brown, is an anti-SALT warhead at the Pentagon. It could explode if Senate critics of the new treaty obtain a copy of this letter and many earlier communications between the chiefs and the president.

This complete record of questions raised by the uniformed military leaders about the treaty—privately called an "audit trail" by one member of the chiefs—was referred to by retired Adm. Elmo Zumwalt, former Chief of Naval Operations, on NBC's "Meet the Press" May 20. Zumwalt said the Senate would be "shocked at how far their [the chiefs'] views have been watered down" if the record is given to the Senate.

"Shocked" the senators might be, but that would not compare with the help given the treaty if, as expected, the president wins approval from all the chiefs. Carter has not been shy in asserting his power as commander in chief.

When the top Army post of chief of staff opened up this spring, Carter overruled not only the Army high command but Secretary Brown himself. After personal interviews, he rejected Gen. John W. Vessey Jr., who as commander in Korea had publicly criticized Carter's troop withdrawal. Instead, Carter dipped down through 17 higher-ranking generals to pick Lt. Gen. Edward C. Meyer, more likely to be cooperative with the White House, to fill the vacancy opening up June 22.

So, there will be no strident anti-SALT campaign by the Carter-appointed chiefs: Jones, Meyer, Adm. T. B. Hayward, Air Force Gen. Lew Allen Jr. and Marine Corps Gen. Robert H. Barrow. But Senate critics perceive the March 12 letter and all other private communications to Carter and Brown as the magnet to extract the chiefs' real fears.

Phrased in most respectful tones, the letter raised serious questions about five different parts of the intricate SALT II treaty, discussing them under the general heading of unacceptable "ambiguities." In brief, the chiefs:

- Warned that U.S. ability to monitor and verify Soviet compliance is by no means assured; even if arrangements could be made with Turkey to replace the lost monitoring bases in Iran, the "fragility" of depending on foreign help is dangerous.

- Hinted that Moscow will insist that the protocol limiting the range of ground-launched and sea-launched Cruise missiles must be extended beyond its 1981 termination. This reflects fear by the chiefs of a worldwide Soviet propaganda outcry against letting the protocol expire, with Moscow possibly threatening to "abrogate" the treaty unless the United States agrees.

- Warned that without full presidential backing for financing the new MX missile, along with a quick decision approving a mobile basing system for it, the Soviet missile threat against American land-based missiles will soon endanger this nation's safety.

- Stated that as drafted, the treaty and its protocol are open to risky and contradictory interpretations on whether the United States can help its European allies build Cruise missiles

under what is called the "non-circumvention" clause.

Much of the March 12 communication, as have prior letters to Carter, dealt with Soviet cheating. The chiefs are not satisfied with the latest treaty version giving the Soviets the right to encode—or withhold from U.S. monitors—missile test data needed to verify compliance. The letter also repeats one of the chiefs' long-standing treaty grievances: not counting the Soviet Backfire bomber, which has an intercontinental range, as a strategic weapon.

The nation's military leaders are convinced that the president will try to deal with some of these "ambiguities" by the simple expedient of "unilateral" U.S. statements before, during and after the Vienna summit between Carter and Leonid Brezhnev. Such statements about SALT I proved worthless because they did not bind the Kremlin. But the chiefs will attest to this fact publicly only if pressed.

Senate critics of the treaty will find little volunteered help from the military chiefs. But they will discover much informed concern if they dig deep enough and ask the right questions. A good place to start is the March 12 letter.

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